Between politics and technocrats – the EU and global health security

Louise Bengtsson

(Stockholm University)

Paper prepared for the CEEISA-ISA Joint International Conference, Ljubljana, 2016

NOTE TO READERS: This PM sketches out the main ideas for my PhD thesis, which is just starting to take shape. I hope to integrate parts of the text below into the initial chapters of a monograph. I very much welcome any kind of input and feedback, especially as regards methodology and research design.

Work in Progress: please do not cite without permission

(louise.bengtsson@ekohist.su.se)
1. Background

The [Ebola] epidemic has shown how we are only as safe as the most fragile states and is a reminder that improvement of the capacity of every country to find, stop, and prevent health threats is both in the world’s self-interest, and a moral imperative. Far too many blind spots remain around the world.

(The Lancet, 2015)

Behind the blaring headlines of the world's many conflicts and emergencies, there lies a silent crisis—a crisis of underdevelopment, of global poverty, of ever-mounting population pressures, of thoughtless degradation of environment. This is not a crisis that will respond to emergency relief. Or to fitful policy interventions. It requires a long, quiet process of sustainable human development.

(UNDP, 1994)

The aim of this thesis is to explore the politics of health security within the realm of the EU institutions. The idea of security carries strong connotations about what is to be considered a threat and justifies protection of a certain “secure” order of things. Over the past decades, health practitioners, security officials and political leaders have increasingly made links between health and security. Following the set-up of new fora such as the Global Health Security Initiative in 2001, the strengthening of the WHO International Health Regulations in 2005, as well as the launch of the Global Health Security Agenda and the first ever UN emergency health mission (UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, UNMEER) in 2014, the notion of health security is now firmly established in the
practitioner world. This development can also be seen against the backdrop of the broadened post-Cold War security agenda, in which so called non-traditional or societal security issues have become prominent topics on national and international political agendas (Burgess 2010). But what does health security really mean? In this thesis I set out to unpack the meaning and effects of health security through the case of the European Union (EU), but a short outline of the politics of health security from a global perspective is provided below.

To a great extent, the global health security regime as represented by US supported multilateral efforts and the WHO framework has focused on quick detection and urgent intervention to fight certain infectious disease outbreaks of pandemic potential. In addition, this objective has often been coupled with the sister mission of combating “bioterrorism”. This idea of what health security should be informs both national policies and international cooperation, but upon closer examination it is neither consensual nor the only possible way to conceive of health security. For instance, resistance to the existing forms of international cooperation has been voiced by developing countries, as when the Indonesian government refused to share virus samples for the development of medical counter measures (which the country claimed would be used to serve the interests of US and European pharmaceutical companies rather than its own citizens) (Curley & Herington 2011). Moreover, Aldis has shown that the assumptions of health security discourse employed by officials differs between UN agencies (Aldis 2008). While the the WHO represents the rapid detection and intervention approach, the UNDP in particular has emphasised a broader human security understanding of health security (Aldis 2008). This approach gained prominence with the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report and has been both criticised and lauded for its broad perspective, emphasising how structural inequalities such as poverty, poor basic sanitary conditions and access to health care are at the root of insecurity. It has been argued that such creeping crises are often
overshadowed by the dominant approaches to health security, which tend to employ a reactive rather than proactive approach. It has also been argued that the dominant approach to health security has meant a tendency to focus mainly on the infectious outbreaks threatening to reach the West, while other diseases remain neglected (Davies 2010; McInnes & Lee 2012).

Health security can also be explored by highlighting perspectives that have been rather silent in the public debate. For instance, NGOs and some practitioners (in particular veterinarians and environmental policy specialists) promoting a so called One Health approach linking human, animal and environmental health have gained some ground in the practitioner world, but seemingly only marginal influence in the shaping of what health security means. The signs that humanity itself, through intensive agriculture and livestock production, deforestation, climate change and complex food chains might contribute to changing patterns of pathogen circulation and is not often raised as a salient security issue.

The discussion above illustrates the need to see health security not as a response to objectively definable threats, but as a contested notion. The meaning of health security is the product of struggles of different perspectives which compete in the shaping of social reality. Yet, looking at the case of the EU, the assertion in some of the secondary literature that dominant approaches to health security always build on reactive exceptionalism and urgency measures also needs to be nuanced. The EU realm involves the bureaucracy of the European Commission but also member state negotiations, expert groups and the broader governance networks of both public and private actors at various levels. When it comes to bureaucracies, it has already been claimed that the technocratisation and resulting shielding from public scrutiny is another way in which health security can be seen as political (Hameiri & Jones 2015). Perhaps, such bureaucratic tendencies in the health field go more in line with the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics, as a form of governmentality
that is not about urgency measures and borders, but about body politics and the control of populations.¹

As it seems, the most extreme representations of scaremongering and border politics are flourishing more in the media than at political or bureaucratic level. In this thesis, I also propose to explore how the politics of health security in the EU is mediated by the practices of the media, in relation to which bureaucrats and politicians have to develop different coping strategies to preserve a sense of legitimacy, acting upon or de-dramatising events in various ways. When it comes to the role of media practices, scholarship on medialisaton (Petersen et al. 2010) has shown how policy makers increasingly prioritise and act according to media logic. In times of constant media coverage, political leaders and organisations have to maneuver media concerns in order to secure expectations management and ultimately a sense of legitimacy. Perhaps, the very notion of a health crisis is born when media begins addressing it as such. Yet, the mediating role of media professionals and their intersection of this field with bureaucratic politics remains unexplored in relation to the health security nexus. An analytical focus exploring, alongside various competing discursive practices, also the role of media professionals does not mean an expectation that bureaucrats always buy into the depictions presented in the media. It might just as well mean bureaucratic attempts to tweak the focus away from the sense of a crisis, in order to manage public expectations and perceptions of legitimacy. However, the observation that media tends to focus on closeness, urgency and sensational news rather than accumulative risks of structural origin, is a tendency that bureaucrats will have to relate to in their work in one way or another.

To sum up, the politics of health security has implications for relations between the EU and the rest of the world and calls for prioritisation between emergencies and creeping crises, between

¹ I thank Stefan Borg for this point
protection of political structures and people, and between ideas of the human and the “natural” world. In this thesis, the ambition is to explore the discursive practices of health security at EU level, focusing in particular on the competing discourses that shape this process. In the EU, health security governance includes professionals ranging from security officials to epidemiologists, development advocates, veterinarians and also media professionals. In this process, some perspectives will be marginalised while others will dominate. However, this does not necessarily mean that other visions of health security are unimaginable, or even inexistent in EU governance. In this discussion, I will also explore on what grounds security discourse can serve as a basis for emancipatory change (McDonald 2008; Nunes 2013; Barnett 2001). This would mean reimagining a more holistic and sustainable vision of health security for both current and future generations.

2. Research questions

The aim of the thesis is not to establish which factors have contributed to the “securitization” of health in the EU. The aim is instead to trace, from an interpretivist perspective, the competing discursive practices that make up what is referred to as health security. A broad understanding of discourse that goes beyond the language/practice dichotomy is employed. Secondly, the aim is to outline which possibilities that are enabled and disabled by this discursive process. From this follows the need to also assess which assumptions that underpin the dominant and more marginalised discourses of health security. Finally, the aim is also to discuss whether we can imagine a more sustainable and inclusive politics of health security. The research questions of the thesis are thus proposed as the following:

RQ1: What are the various discursive practices, conceived of in a broad sense beyond language, competing in the meaning-making of health security? Which assumptions do they rely on?
RQ2: Which political possibilities are enabled by this process? Which perspectives are marginalised?

RQ3: Can we imagine a different politics of health security?

3. Case selection

To answer the research questions above I will look at the case of health security in the EU, which remains unexplored from a critical security studies perspective. The notion of health security has become a concern for the EU both in its internal and external policies. Today, a comprehensive EU framework is in place targeting the generic category of “serious cross border threats to health”, which also includes deliberate release of chemical or biological substances, health threats posed by natural disasters, and even future threats that are yet “unknown”. A dedicated “health threats” unit has been established in the European Commission, and member state coordination is organised through the Health Security Committee. Health security as a notion and policy area is also constituted by a range of bureaucratic practices including use of medical intelligence tools and systems for surveillance as well as early warning and response, that are managed by the European Commission and its dedicated agency (the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control). Externally, the European Commission represents the member states in the Global Health Security Initiative together with the G7 countries plus Mexico. The EU also has to position itself in relation to the requirements and prerogatives of the WHO regime, such as the coherent implementation at Member State level of obligations under the International Health Regulations.

While some form of historical outlook will be offered in the thesis, I have chosen to focus in particular on two (re)emerging diseases which have gained recent media salience as global concerns: the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa and the Zika virus outbreak in
South America. Since 2014, health as a security issue has undoubtedly gained unprecedented media attention, and the two outbreaks have helped to bring about large scale reflection on the current global frameworks for health security. In both cases, a range of different professional communities were involved in shaping the politics of health security. At the same time, and perhaps most clearly during the Ebola outbreak, media practices have been something to which bureaucracies had to relate in the perceived quest for a sense of legitimacy.

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa revealed not only the inadequacy of national and international response, but also a clash of different perspectives. Poor health systems, fragile institutions and limited access to medicines in West Africa facilitated the spread of disease in a way that would not have happened in Europe or North America. The disease became such a strain for West African health systems that also the non-infected were left without access to basic health services. Ultimately, the failure of the international community to address the Ebola outbreak in a timely manner inspired large scale reflection on global and regional reform, and discussions in professional communities around the very notion and scope of health security as well as the roots of insecurities (Heymann et al. 2015). The role of development and humanitarian aid professionals as well as pharmaceutical companies all participated in this process. However, the European Commission did not seem to resort to alarmist discourse.

When it comes to the Zika outbreak in Brazil which followed only shortly after in 2016, this outbreak again put the questioned international framework to the test, and the WHO was indeed quicker this time in its proclamation of a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern”. At national level, the outbreak was handled almost as a military operation by the Brazilian government which “declared war” on the aedes aegypti mosquito, and over 200 000 staff from the navy, air force and army was dispatched to fight the virus with insecticide, larvicide and controls of water in
backyards. In some provinces, genetically modified mosquitoes were released in the hope that they would prevent the infectious mosquito from reproducing. Perhaps more clearly than during other outbreaks, the environmental forces affecting the spread of diseases (such as climate change) became visible. During the Zika outbreak, which is still ongoing, the involvement of expert communities in recommendations of various kinds, often through the media, has also been prominent. The way EU is relating to these developments is still unfolding, so the idea is to begin by studying the Ebola case.

On a final note, the choice to focus on the Ebola and Zika outbreaks could in itself very well be criticized in that it conforms to the very media logic that it aims to assess as part of the analysis. The sudden intense media attention on the Ebola and Zika outbreaks as “new” threats or “crises” should therefore be approached from a critical perspective. The timing at which these outbreaks (as opposed to other global health challenges) became salient, and when they will cease to be, is an important aspect that needs to be a part of the analysis. Keeping such a critical approach to the timing and silences of “health crises”, I still maintain that the time period of these cases is a useful way to limit my study.

4. Literature review

Complementing securitization theory

Securitization theory, also referred to as the Copenhagen School, has made a significant contribution to the field of security studies in that it provided a framework to explore how new issues “become” security problems (Buzan et al. 1998). This theoretical innovation, but above all its criticisms, is an important point of departure for this thesis. In order to understand the politics of health security, I argue that the securitization framework needs to be reconceived with the help of interpretivist perspectives in security studies and IR. In the section below, I outline the contribution and limitation of security
studies and IR in relation to my research questions. However, I start with a note on the role of theories themselves for the politics of security.

The nature of security and security theories

When it comes to the nature of security, the over-quoted notion of an “essentially contested concept” (Buzan 1983: 6) can hardly be understated as a description of the debates that have unfolded in academia. Yet, theories of security are not just a matter for academic journals. With their various underlying assumptions about what security is or should be and how it should be managed, theorists of security are part of the social process of meaning-making which eventually delimits the possibilities of security politics. In this sense, academic practices are part of the very securitization process, and contributes to (re)producing or challenging of “common knowledge” about what should be protected and how. The assumptions of various streams in security studies and IR thus need to be taken seriously as to their real world effects and political implications. As put by Nunes:

"The condition of insecurity can be transformed not only by social struggles, but also by ideas that shape these struggles. Theories draw the boundaries of political imagination and possibility; they are appropriated by actors and help to constitute the self-perception and behaviour. By helping to shape reality, security theory is ultimately a form of politics.”(Nunes 2013, p.9)

In this section, I outline the contributions and limitations of various strands in security studies and IR more broadly for the purpose of my thesis. I start from objectivist approaches in realism and human security which I claim should be treated as part of the discursive processes that constitute approaches to health security more broadly beyond academia. I then turn to constructivist and poststructuralist approaches in global governance, security studies and IR.
Realist approaches in security studies

International Security Studies as Buzan and Hansen conceive of the field, was born during the Cold War in an environment that suited its focus on military threats and states as referent objects (Buzan & Hansen 2009, p.11). Central to the early years was scholarship in Strategic Studies, which can be thought of as the “specialist military–technical wing of the Realist approach to IR” (Buzan & Hansen 2009, p.16). While military strategy in the context of ideological struggle of superpowers was the main focus, the foundations of power and factors that would presumably lead to conflict were also addressed (Buzan & Hansen 2009, p.16). From a broader realist perspective, scholars thus also came to reflect on how a range of “threats” beyond the military could come to “affect” (the idea of) national security. This included the way in which instability of the “third world” including environmental problems such as resource scarcity and civil unrest might threaten state security in the West. Out of this tradition came some quite deterministic, neo-Malthusian accounts about how issues such as environmental degradation or population growth would presumably lead to insecurity spreading from poorer countries. Some more contemporary accounts inspired by this tradition are represented in The Coming Anarchy (Kaplan 2002) and Resource War (Klare 2002). While this imagery served to place security and vulnerability of the developing world on the agenda, this approach is limited not only by its deterministic causal assumptions (Homer-Dixon 2010) but also by its focus on the (Western) state as the referent object (Barnett 2001; Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2010). Similar tendencies can also be found in relation to health; realist-inspired contributions on health security or “biosecurity”, emphasise “biodefence” meant to target bioterrorism but also infectious diseases (Fidler & Gostin 2007).

Realist logics focusing on the state as referent object are often the prevalent perspective of national and international security agendas even when focus is broadened beyond military security to issues
such as health and the environment. To sum up, although some realist approaches have contributed to the “broadening” of security agendas to include issues beyond military threats, this did not mean a “deepening” in terms of referent objects beyond the state.

**Human security**

Turning to more recent developments in security studies, one of the most influential contributions has been proposed by scholars of human security (Booth 2007). More specifically, this strand both deepened and broadened the notion of security to cover a range of obstacles to human emancipation, ranging from environmental factors to poverty. With its normative agenda, the perspective has also gained pervasive policy influence above all in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, which emphasised “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear” as features of human security (Undp 1994). The approach to security is almost all-encompassing, and includes a focus on sustainability as fundamental to human security (Booth 2007, p.330). The human security approach remains objectivist but shows how scholarship and policymaking can pose a challenge to dominant approaches to security. The human security perspective is prominent among development professionals, and is reflected in the UNDPs approach to health security (Aldis 2008).

As outlined above, realist and human security perspectives propose different approaches to security, relying on their own respective assumptions about what should be the referent object of security. The perspectives are also associated indirectly with different kinds of professional communities. The theories outlined above are thus a testimony of how academic work contributes to the way in which health security is constituted in discursive practices. While these academic streams expose security as a contested concept of political relevance, they are, if applied alone, limited theoretically by their own ontologies. For the purpose of this thesis, they have instead served indirectly as a heuristic for the identification of various ways in which security is understood. They help us isolate the different
assumptions that can underpin security discourse and how they might compete in social processes, but are in themselves limited for my purpose. In order to work out a framework that can analyse health security as a contested phenomenon in the making, we need to turn to theories with an interpretivist foundation. Before I embark on a more focused discussion in this regard, I turn briefly to the global governance literature as well as securitization theory, on which much of the inspiration for this thesis has sprung.

Global governance literature

The most detailed accounts on health security can be found in the global health governance literature. Drawing rather lightly on constructivism and illustrated by rich empirical examples, this strand has discussed the nature and implications of health security as a type of framing practice in global health governance (Davies 2008; McInnes & Lee 2012; Rushton 2011; Davies et al. 2015). Some normative elements are proposed, including criticism of the tendency of the global health security regime to focus on those outbreaks that can reach the West, a distortion of resource allocation to infectious diseases over other health conditions as well as a lack of attention to structural problems including intensive agriculture and animal farming. These approaches are rich empirically and provide some normative reflections, and also sometimes extend to reflect on international as compared to national framings of health security (McInnes & Lee 2012). However, this work lacks a more thorough engagement with meta-theoretical questions and substantive theory, and also does not take into account the additional range of assumptions on which health security discourse can rely.

The limits of securitization theory

In the field of security studies, a perspective that has focused more directly on security as an inter-subjective phenomenon is securitization theory or the so-called Copenhagen School tradition. This approach has frequently been applied to show how new issues such as health or the environment “become” security issues. In the
original framework, this happens as political elites employ security language that, if accepted by the public, can pave the way for exceptional measures (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). While the framework is often characterised as requiring linguistic speech acts for securitization to occur, the paradigmatic case for developing the theoretical approach was Ostpolitik, i.e. a long process of de-securitisation not reducible to speech act moments.\(^2\) Also in its more recent variations, securitization is often conceived of as a broader set of performative practices beyond language (Balzacq et al. 2010; C.a.s.e Collective 2006). This can include professional and bureaucratic practices (Bigo & Tsoukala 2008), images in the media (Williams 2003), practices of expert journals (Vuori 2010), bodily practices or even silences (Hansen, 2000). Another issue is the (alleged) requirement that an “audience” needs to accept a securitization move. Given the difficulty to assess in practice whether such acceptance is granted and by whom, more sympathetic readings of the Copenhagen School again emphasise incremental process rather than moments of audience acceptance (Guzzini 2011).

While securitization theory has triggered a much needed rethinking of security, a main limitation of the framework remains the realist notion of security that underpins the theory. This blind spot, it has been argued, prevents us from understanding how security can be given various meanings beyond Schmittian exceptionalism (McDonald 2008; Williams 2003). This limitation is the very point of the framework according to its founders, since it served to debunk the “diluting”, widening approach of human security scholarship. As a consequence, normative debates (to the extent that they take place in mainstream applications of securitization theory) are stuck in the discussion around securitization vs “desecuritization”, and cannot grasp the various implications depending on the assumptions of security discourse. The original Copenhagen School framework simply favours “desecuritization” (Wæver 1995, p.57). The dichotomy of security as “bad” and non-security as “good” can also

\(^2\) I am indebted to Stefano Guzzini for this comment.
be found in some critical approaches more broadly. For instance, Huysmans describes our society as one in which the fabrication of insecurities, both through exceptional measures and more diffuse risk management, contribute to a politics based on suspicion and fear as opposed to democratic practices (Huysmans 2014). Also Aradau takes a similar position, in which security (bad) is pitted against democracy and emancipation (good), without resorting to a rethinking of security itself as in the Critical Security Studies/Welsh School tradition (Aradau 2004).

As regards health and the environment, others have argued that securitization can also bring positive possibilities. For instance, there is an ongoing debate around whether securitisation of the environment can sometimes be desirable, given for instance the attention and resources that can be mobilised (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams 2014, pp.98–99). These discussions however still miss the possibility that different assumptions underlying security discourse will result in the enabling of different possibilities. In this regard, McDonald has proposed that a fundamental starting point for an normative discussion of securitization needs to be the referent object, which can range from national to international, human and ecological security (McDonald 2008; McDonald 2016).

As regards the securitization of health, some contributions have already been made to unpack this normative debate. Enemark for instance has discussed the implications of national as opposed to collective health security (Enemark 2009) while Caballero-Anthony has proposed the relevance of an integrated public goods approach (as opposed to sectoral securitization) as normatively desirable for the protection of human security (Caballero-Anthony 2006). Wishnick on the other hand has proposed that a risk management approach would be preferable to desecuritization, especially in authoritarian states:

“Although the Copenhagen School favours desecuritization as a return to normal practices, in the Chinese cases
desecuritizing moves proved detrimental, involving cover-ups and restrictions on activists pressing for greater information” (Wishnick 2010).

To sum up, although it has its limitations, securitization theory can still provide the basis for an interpretivist understanding of security. However, this would require seeing securitization as a broader societal process which in turn enables rather than causes particular political possibilities (Guzzini 2011; Stritzel 2007). However, insights from interpretivist approaches in IR more broadly are needed to further complement the notion of a securitization process in my study. This would allow for a more dynamic analysis involving various (more or less dominant) approaches to security competing in a social process where power comes at play. An attempt to outline how an interpretivist approach to security can further my case is presented below.

Interpretivism and “how” questions

As Adler puts it, constructivism is not just an IR theory about the nature of the international political system, but a meta-theoretical approach to science and a social theory (Adler 2008). By explicitly challenging mainstream IR, it connects more thoroughly with the foundations of philosophy of science. As put by Ruggie, constructivism has challenged prevailing IR theories in fundamental ways:

[it has pushed theorists to] problematize the interests and identities of actors; deeper to incorporate the intersubjective bases of social action and social order; and into the dimensions of space and time to establish international structure as contingent practice, constraining social action but also being (re)created and, therefore, potentially transformed by it. (Ruggie 1998, p.1)

However, not all constructivists rely on the assumption of co-constitution when it comes to causal claims. A discussion about the
foundations of different kinds of constructivism can help to illustrate how securitization can be rethought. To begin with, the more conventional or so called modernist approaches to constructivism often adhere to positivist epistemology. More specifically, as noted by Buzan and Hansen:

Conventional Constructivists were traditionalists not only insofar as they accepted a concept of military-state security, but in that they conformed to a substantive and epistemological traditionalist research agenda which held that security studies and IR should be devoted to explanations of state behaviour (Buzan & Hansen 2009, p.192).

While hugely influential modernist constructivists contributed to IR more broadly by looking at ideational factors such as norm diffusion, persuasion or arguing the research puzzle in modernist constructivism often remains positivist in that it aims to establish or at least probe the causal value of a theory or a variable. In a way, moderate constructivism thus worked as a complement rather than fundamental challenge to rational choice in IR, in that its mission remains to explain outcomes of the same kinds of research puzzles (Adler 2008). Typically, this means asking “why” questions i.e. what are the reasons or independent variables that can explain a certain outcome on the dependent variable. As an example, even though securitization theory does not take the nature of security for granted, mainstream applications of securitization theory have interpreted audience acceptance of a securitization move as a causal relation, requiring certain conditions. This has contributed to an academic cotton industry of establishing under what circumstances audiences accept such political moves.

If we do not want to accept that health security and “health threats” have an objective meaning or that securitization can be analysed as some form of causal relation, one needs to go back to the performativity of a broader notion of security discourse (which, some would argue, was the point of the Copenhagen framework in
the first place). Such a “thick” constructivist approach would have to rely on an interpretivist notion of causality or co-constitution. From this perspective, Doty is commonly cited to explain the limitation of “why” questions as opposed to “how” questions:

*why questions generally take as unproblematic the possibility that particular policies and practices could happen. They presuppose the identities of social actors and a background of social meanings. In contrast, how questions examine how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects and others, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions that create certain possibilities and preclude others* (Doty 1996)

In juxtaposition, Doty outlines the alternative of “how” questions, which focus instead on the way in which discourse and the meaning given to phenomena enables or disables (rather than causes) different possibilities. The difference between “how” and “why” questions can also be illustrated by Hollis’s distinction between explaining (as in the case of why questions) and understanding (as in how questions) (Hollis 1994). The interpretivist mission to understand rather than explain social reality is expressed in the tendency of “thick” constructivism to focus on mutually constituted process rather than functions of independent and dependent variables. In this tradition, social phenomena are not rule-bound. Instead, discourse enables certain possibilities. In this sense, constructivism offers an important corrective to the hypothetico-deductive mode of theory construction. Bourdieu for instance even refrained from talking about his work as theory, preferring instead the notion of “thinking tools”.

Moreover, it is important to point out that even though “thick” constructivism suggests that the meaning of social phenomena is inherently unstable and dependent on human interpretation, taking such an approach does not have to imply a denial of material reality: “emphasizing the material aspect of post-structuralism’s conception
of discourse, the point is not to disregard material facts but to study how these are produced and prioritized.” (Hansen 2006, p.20). Actually, one could say that the material is indeed on the rise in interpretivist approaches. The “new materialism” turn should serve to debunk the misunderstanding that discourse analysis “only deals with language” (Lundborg & Vaughan-Williams 2015). The meaning given to material phenomena such as pathogens and climate change is definitely a matter of interest for interpretivist research. To say that security as discourse underestimates the existence of material reality, is thus not totally accurate.

To sum up, not all constructivists belong to Hollis’s “understanding” (as opposed to “explaining”) category. Norms, for instance, are used in modernist constructivist approaches as variables for explaining causality. However, for the purpose of this thesis I propose to draw on the constructivism of “understanding”, so that the notion of securitization can be given a more open-ended, process-oriented scope drawing on the performativity of discursive practices.

*Interpretivism, power and normative questions*

What “critical” refers to in the notion of “critical IR” or “critical security studies” is in itself a topic for a paper. Generally, authors associated with this field come from very different traditions ranging from feminist studies and Critical Theory to poststructuralists. The interpretivist philosophy of science foundations of what I referred to as “thick” constructivism in the section above applies to some, but not all such scholarship. If we take Adler’s distinctions in IR constructivism (Adler 2008), an common aspect of critical/radical/poststructuralist constructivism in IR is that discourse reflects power relations. By this follows that that knowledge is always to some extent a function of power. Central to those perspectives is that the role of power is seen as *productive*:

> the way in which power works to constitute particular modes of subjectivity and interpretive dispositions [...] is not the kind of power that pre-existing social actors possess and use.
Rather, it is a kind of power that produces meaning, subject identities, their interrelationships, and a range of imaginable conduct (Doty 1996, p.4)

On the topic of normativity, value statements are typically dealt with differently in critical constructivism and poststructuralist accounts. Essentially, do we believe in the possibility of dialogue in view of a universally better world order, or do we see the notion of “the good” as entirely relational and thus limit our scholarly ambitions to the deconstruction current discourses? From the classic poststructural perspective, politics comes before ethics, in the sense that dominant discursive practices enable a certain shared sense of what is “good” or “bad”. As such, a poststructural critique is thus posed against something, rather than expressed from a “neutral” point of view. However, the distinction here is not crystal clear. A middle way is to trace the resistance to dominant discourses in order to explore how marginalised views challenge the status quo. One could then address the question of which possibilities the dominant discourse enables and disables, and discuss the consequences. Some scholarship drawing on poststructuralism has seen as its task not only to deconstruct dominant logics, but also to reimagine reality as one of more emancipatory ends (Nunes 2013).

Interpretivism and various logics of security

Poststructuralist accounts of security often draw on Foucault, suggesting that the power to define knowledge and thus also the content of security is manifested in wider social processes of liberal governmentality. Some of the most significant contributions draw on Foucault’s “governmentality of unease”, which has been readapted by Didier Bigo and the Paris school in the suggestion that the practices (such as monitoring and surveillance) of security professionals generate the very insecurities they are allegedly supposed to address (Bigo & Tsoukala 2008). Applications of Foucault’s scholarship also include the pervasiveness of liberal “biopolitics”, i.e. the body politics governing populations, explored
by Elbe in relation to health security (Elbe 2010). Another stream has taken a critical approach to the logic of “resilience”, which works to relocate the responsibility to withstand natural disasters from the political to the individual level, thereby contributing to the impression that crises are non-avoidable and non-preventable (Evans & Reid 2014).

5. Theoretical apparatus

To sum up the section above, interpretivist approaches in IR and critical security studies can bring a more thorough engagement with “how” questions, power, normativity and the various kinds of possible (in)security practices to securitization scholarship. Insights from the discussions above can be used to reconceive of how issues become security problems and what politics it entails. In such an analysis, theory does not take an explanatory function, but its various aspects serve as “thinking tools” that make the analysis possible in the first place.

The point of departure of such a framework is that health security should be approached as a contested notion that can mean different things at different times and in different communities. An analysis thus needs to open up the securitization process to allow for an examination of various competing discursive practices of security. In relation to particular disease outbreaks, some discourses will dominate, while others will remain marginalised or even silent. The performativity of dominant discourses of health security then enable certain political possibilities. The silences instead represent political perspectives lost in the process.

More specifically, the analytical framework could build on the notion of a securitization process, but employing a broader understanding of discourse that goes beyond language to include various kinds of (in)security practices. In this sense, security discourse is neither a response to objective threats nor a securitizing
speech act, but a process of meaning-making which also generates the insecurities themselves (Balzacq et al. 2010; C.a.s.e Collective 2006):

“[this approach] insists on the need to analyze security and insecurity not only as a process but as the same process of (in)securitization. It insists on practices as forms of social interactions which are derived from objective relations, rules of the game, which are neither directly visible nor conscious, but are more real than any description of the “substance” of a concept.”(C.a.s.e Collective 2006, p.2)

Moreover, a focus on discursive process means rejecting the idea of a top-down chain of events, in favour of an interpretivist approach to causality or co-constitution (Stritzel 2007; Guzzini 2011). In this way, we can also understand securitization as a wider social process extending beyond the sphere of political elites, in that security discourse covers all levels of society, including professional communities and the media. A variety of voices from more or less privileged positions will articulate different discourses, but some will dominate. An important perspective in the analysis will also be the way in which power is embodied in this process.

Turning now to the political aspects of health security, I propose to analyse how various approaches to health security will have different consequences that deserve attention as to their implications. For such an analysis, the question of the referent object (i.e. who should be protected) is of central importance: “defining and redefining security, and making sense of the assumptions and implications of different security discourses, necessitates attention to whose security we’re talking about” (McDonald 2016). Drawing on this idea, I propose to integrate the referent object in the analysis. Do discourses propose to protect national/regional security, international security, human security and ecological security? The ecosystem as referent object here can refer not solely to the protection of ecosystems per se but the protection of a larger whole, where the human condition is
seen as inseparable from nature. This conception of the referent object goes in line with theories of post-human security ethics (Mitchell 2016), “world security” (Bilgic 2016) as well as green political theory (Goodin 2013). The essential idea here is that collective and individual security is inseparable from nature, i.e. the human condition is considered as one with that of ecosystems and related processes.

6. Method, Methodology and Material

The methodology and methods of the thesis will have to be further elaborated. Worth noting is that taking an interpretivist approach to discourse does not have to imply a denial of material reality, nor a focus exclusively on text. The role of material practices, timing, silences and other kinds of (in)action by professionals are seen as part of the discursive process. This broader notion of discourse and its variations can be captured by using a variety of different sources including interviews, official documents and minutes from official meetings.

New developments in critical security studies have emphasised the need to provide more rigour to interpretivist methodology (Aradau et al. 2014; Hansen 2006; Salter & Mutlu 2002). One approach could be to borrow (quite liberally) part of the methodological steps in Lene Hansen’s discourse analysis (Hansen 2006). According to this methodology, a small number of “basic” ideal type discourses are identified based on a larger reading of material in the field, including media and secondary sources. This first step could, for the purpose of this thesis, be carried out to trace basic discourses (in a “broad-brush” way) within the broader global landscape of health security beyond the European Union level. This would cover secondary literature, selected media reporting, official communication and documents from various organisations involved in global health security governance (including NGO:s, think tanks, the private
sector and international organisations) and possibly some pilot interviews.

Once a few basic discourses have been identified at global level, a second step of closer analysis could be carried out in which the prevalence of those ideal type discourses is traced in a more limited setting i.e. European governance focusing on the realm of the EU institutions. As stated by Hansen: “The analytical value of basic discourses is […] that they provide a lens through which a multitude of different approaches and policies can be seen as systematically connected and that they identify the key points of structuring disagreement within a debate.” (Hansen, 2006, pp. 46–47) Moreover: “The ideal-type character of basic discourses furthermore implies that they are often modified and variations constructed over time” (Hansen 2006, p.47). In other words, the approach allows the tracing of several potential approaches to health security within EU governance, identified from the outset. This would enable the identification of dominant discourses at EU level, but also silences. The aim of capturing such silences methodologically will be a major ambition of this thesis.

However, other methodological approaches apart from the one above are also possible. An alternative way could be interpretivist process tracing. If empirical research reveals a clear case to focus on the enabling of a certain outcome or dominant security discourse, this could be an option (Guzzini 2011). Likewise, if professional fields are clearly distinguishable, I might prefer to replace the approach proposed above with a Bourdieusian study of fields of practice. This would involve looking at the way in which symbolic capital, expertise and habitus shape the struggles over social meaning in communities of professionals.

As for the material, the second part of the analysis looking at EU governance would be based on both written and oral sources. As for the relevant documents these could include the following: official press releases from the Commission, Council and EU agencies;
Commission communications, action plans and reports; Council conclusions, minutes (which would have to be requested) from meetings of the relevant Council formations, working groups expert meetings; and documents from the Health Security Committee which is chaired by the Commission but attended by national officials at high level. In terms of interviews, these could be carried out with various kinds of professionals within and outside the EU institutions. This could include employees in different Directorate Generals of the Commission such as DG SANTE, DG DEVCO; DG ECHO, DG AGRI as well as the EU External Action Service. Professionals in the Cabinets of the relevant Commissioners as well as in the central services of the Commission, including the Secretariat General could also be of great use. Moreover, I propose to interview employees of the Member State permanent representations as well as in the Council Secretariat and possibly also in the European Parliament. Also the US representation in Brussels could be of interest given the priority of health security for the current and previous US administration. The Commission’s agency for disease prevention and control (ECDC) in Stockholm should also be a good place to look for interviewees. If possible, I could also aim to approach some experts from selected Member States working at national level but participating in the meetings of expert and working groups within the Council as well as the high level Health Security Committee chaired by the Commission. Another group of potential interviewees could be media professionals, NGOs and lobbyists from the private sector working with European Affairs.

As for the time span, the broader outline of different approaches to health security in global governance would have to be wide. The second step i.e. the way in which certain approaches to health security has come to prevail in EU governance will have to be more limited, possibly covering only the period between 2014-2016 and the Ebola and the Zika virus outbreaks.
7. Final remarks

At this early stage I can offer no preliminary results, but perhaps some early indication of points of interest worth exploring. One aim of the thesis would be to look for nuances in the way dominant discourses of health security are practiced in EU governance. Here, there are indications that the Commission has opted for technicalisation and even de-dramatisation during recent outbreaks (i.e. after the swine flu outbreak in 2009), while certain member state governments have resorted to more traditional security discourse. Perhaps bureaucratic practices of the Commission tend towards the projection of control rather than exceptionalism and urgency? The medialisation perspective here should be particularly interesting to explore further. However, I also expect to find different approaches to health security in EU governance, depending on the professional logics at play in different Directorate Generals or even units within the Commission. In particular, I am interested in exploring the potential role of development professionals and veterinarians in proposing alternative approaches to infectious disease control. As an example, the trend referred to as One Health, deriving from norm entrepreneurs but also widely accepted in international organisations such as the FAO, proposes to treat human disease as a matter that should be dealt with together with experts from the veterinary and environmental field. This comprehensive approach, to some extent reflecting the idea of the human and natural world as one referent object, seems to hold some ground in the Commission but is competing with other visions of health security that seem to gain more salience. A major part of the thesis will be dedicated to exploring such marginalised approaches to the health security nexus, in order to outline how these are mediated within the bureaucracy. In this sense, the thesis will serve to further highlight health security as a matter that has no inherent meaning, and can be reimagined to serve more sustainable or emancipatory purposes.
8. References


Caballero-Anthony, M., 2006. Combating infectious diseases in East Asia:


Hansen, L., 2000. The Little Mermaid’s Silent Security Dilemma and the


